DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 104 CS 010 878

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TITLE Aspects of Reading in ESL and L1 Students.
SPONS AGENCY Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Ottawa (Ontario).
PUB DATE Dec 91
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (41st, Palm Springs, CA, December 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Intermediate Grades; Miscue Analysis; *Native Speakers; Oral Reading; Reading Research; *Recall (Psychology); Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS British Columbia; Retelling

ABSTRACT

A study examined English-as-a-Second-Langauge (ESL) and native English speaking (L1) students' recall of propositional knowledge, story structure elements, inferential comprehension, and the types and frequencies of oral reading miscues. Reading tasks were administered to 30 students (aged 9 to 13) from each of the three linguistic groups (Cantonese, Vietnamese, Punjabi) and 30 native English speakers. The second language subjects were placed in 14 different ESL classrooms in British Columbia. The reading tasks were based on well-structured two-episode stories written for this purpose and were of similar readability. Unaided retelling was followed by prompts relative to each story proposition as well as five inferential questions. Retellings were transcribed and analyzed. Results indicated that, in the non-English groups: (1) story endings were interpreted differently; (2) inferential questions were handled differently; and (3) that the total number of miscues was higher. Findings suggest that caution may need to be exercised when making predictions about story endings with children from these language backgrounds. (One figure and two tables of data are included.) (RS)

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Aspects of Reading in ESL and L1 Students

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Aspects of Reading in ESL and L1 Students[1]

Paper presented at the 41st Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference
Palm Springs, California; December 4, 1991

Background & Purpose

Gunderson (1991) indicates that most ESL students in the USA and Canada "are enroled in mainstream classrooms where they are taught to read using mainstream methods, practices, and materials," and furthermore these students make up a significant percentage of students in the school system. While Froese (1990) has reported the difficulty of encoding and decoding effects in ESL and L1 students, this study examines in more detail various aspects of reading in order to better understand any interference which might result from ESL students using mainstream methods of reading instruction.

The purpose of this paper is to report in more detail ESL and L1 students' recall of propositional knowledge, story structure elements, inferential comprehension, and of types and frequencies of oral reading miscues. The findings are part of a larger study in which in addition to reading, three other language modes--retelling, writing, and dictation (oral composing)--were investigated (See Figure 1). The instruments were intended to fulfil the requirements of communicative tests specified by Wesche (1987, 382); that is, they were to be pragmatic tasks, test a range of language functions, be criterion-referenced, be reliable, and feasible to administer.

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[1]This research was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Methodology

Sample

The reading tasks were administered to thirty subjects from each linguistic group--Cantonese, Vietnamese, Punjabi (L2) and thirty native English speakers (L1). The L2 subjects were students placed in 14 different ESL classrooms according to school district guidelines, had resided in British Columbia for five or less years, and were between the ages of 9 and 13. The L2 subjects essentially exhausted the pool of subjects available to participate in the study which met these criteria. The L1 subjects were randomly selected from three of the same fourteen schools. In short, language competency rather than age or other features was the criterial attribute used in selecting the L2 students. The data were collected by four graduate research assistants who were trained in the methods developed by Froese (1987), King & Rentel (1981), Schewe (1986) and Schewe & Froese (1987).

Materials

The reading exercises were based on well-structured two-episode stories written for this purpose and were of similar readability (i.e. grade 4-5). Unaided retelling was followed by prompts relative to each story proposition as well as five inferential questions. All oral aspects were taperecorded to make cross-checking possible. The specific step-by-step procedures used for eliciting reading responses were contained in a one-page guide and detailed scoring guides were developed for each dependent variable (available upon request). Approximately 10% of the analyses were scored by a second person and discussed with the original scorer to assure accuracy.

Data Transcription

Retellings were transcribed and analyzed for common quantitative language units: total number of words produced, words/t-unit, dependent clauses. Additionally, the number of propositions recalled (unaided and aided), type of story elements included (setting, initiating event, internal response, goal, attempt, outcome and end), and number of inferential questions successfully answered, was determined. Five types of miscues were counted: omission, insertion, repetition, substitution, and no pronunciation. Plans are being made to further analyze the most common miscue "substitution" for further subcategorization into those reflecting plurals, possessives, -ed endings, tenses, articles, or pronouns (These results are not reported here.).

Analysis & Findings

The data, part of a larger study, was collected in 1988, coded and analyzed during 1989, and statistical analysis begun in 1990. While initially repeated measures ANOVAs were computed for this part of the study, large standard deviations for some of the dependent variables prompted a homogeneity of variance check using Bartlett's procedures. Since not all the variables met the homogeneity assumptions, it was decided to use a non-parametric ANOVA of ranks (SAS Version 6, 1985).

The results for the 22 dependent variables across the four language groups--Punjabi, Cantonese, Vietnamese, and English--are found in Table 1. Statistically significant differences between the language groups were found for the story structure element, END, for INFERENTIAL COMPREHENSION, for the miscues REPETITION and

SUBSTITUTION, and for the number of WORDS PER CLAUSE in the retelling. To explore further the location of the differences, Table 2 presents the comparisons for the above significant findings. The Punjabi speakers differed from the English speakers on the variables END, INFERENTIAL COMPREHENSION, and TOTAL MISCUES. The Punjabi speakers also differed from the Cantonese speakers on the variable SUBSTITUTION. The Cantonese speakers differed from the English speakers on the variables END, INFERENTIAL COMPREHENSION, REPETITION, SUBSTITUTION, and TOTAL MISCUES. The Vietnamese speakers differed from the English speakers on the variables END, INFERENTIAL COMPREHENSION, REPETITION, TOTAL MISCUES, and WORDS PER CLAUSE in the retelling.

Discussion

These findings suggest some differences in the reading behaviours of the Punjabi, Cantonese, Vietnamese, and English speakers in the study. There is reasonable indication that story endings are interpreted differently by the non-English groups; that inferential questions are handled differently; and that the total number of miscues is higher. Less consistent differences, but nevertheless, significant differences are found in some types of miscues (repetitions and substitutions). On the retelling variable only the Vietnamese speakers produced different results from the English speakers.

While instructional implications cannot be directly drawn from this study, the findings suggest that caution may need to be exercised when making predictions about story endings with children from these language backgrounds. Thorough discussion may need to follow

the reading of stories to prevent misconceptions to occur. The differences found in the answering of the inferential questions is probably related since inferential information must come from prior experience, and that experience may well be different in these different ethnolinguistic groups. As pointed out by Carrell & Eisterhold (1987, 224): "Second language learners attempt to provide schemata to make sense of texts, and they do so persistently. However, these efforts will fail if the reader cannot access the appropriate existing schemata, or if the reader does not possess the appropriate schemata necessary to understand a text." These authors and others suggest language experiences, cloze procedures, and narrow reading (Krashen, 1981) as instructional approaches which may aid in overcoming culturally specific schema.

This study allows a somewhat unique view of the differences in the four language groups from a linguistic (words/clause), a psycholinguistic (miscues), a text structure (story elements), and a pedagogic perspective (inferential questions). As observed by Wesche (1987, 375): "If we aim to evaluate the communicative abilities of second language learners and speakers, we need to test many levels of competence simultaneously." The potential for discovering something about learning and instruction from such a multi-dimensional approach seems promising.

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Figure 1

Procedural Overview of Larger Study (Froese, 1990)

Mode	Stimulus	Response	Analysis
Reading	Subject reads independently	Subject retells to adult Inf. Questions asked	Recalls transcribed & analyzed
Retelling	Adult reads to subject	Subject retells to different adult Inf. Questions asked	Recalls transcribed & analyzed
Writing	Subject views picture	Subject writes independently	Writing is analyzed
Oral Composing	Subject views picture	Subject dictates to adult who writes it down	Writing is analyzed

Table 1

NPAR1WAY ANOVA for dependent variables for four language groups - Punjabi, Cantonese, Vietnamese, English

Dependent Variable	Anova (df 2,115)	Probability>F	
	Propositional Knowledge		
UCRD uncued	1.237	0.2994	NS
CURD cued	0.950	0.4189	NS
	Story Structure Elements		
SERD setting	1.020	0.3867	NS
IERD initiating event	0.927	0.4301	NS
IRRD internal response	1.037	0.3790	NS
GRD goal	0.925	0.4309	NS
ARD attempt	1.033	0.3810	NS
ORD outcome	0.735	0.5332	NS
ERD end	**2.958**	**0.0353**	**SIG**
	Inferential Comprehension		
IQRD inferential	**3.381**	**0.0224**	**SIG**
	Miscues		
RMO omission	0.732	0.5347	NS
RMI insertion	1.176	0.3219	NS
RMR repetition	**2.545**	**0.0596**	**SIG**
RMS substitution	**4.107**	**0.0083**	**SIG**
RMTO no pronunciation	1.921	0.1301	NS
PC total miscues	2.463	0.0660	?NS
	Recall from Retelling		
URD words/t-unit	1.051	0.3743	NS
TRD number of t-units	1.958	0.1263	NS
TCRD clauses/t-unit	1.480	0.2257	NS
WCRD words/clause	**2.755**	**0.0472**	**SIG**
CRD number of clauses	1.989	0.1215	NS
WRD number of words	1.019	0.3882	NS

Table 2

Means and comparison of means for significant dependent variables

Dependent Variable	Means for Language Groups				* Sig. Comparisons
	Punjabi	Cantonese	Vietnamese	English	p<.05
Story Structure					
ERD end	79.310	85.484	81.034	96.667	14,24,34
Inferential Comprehension					
IQRD	4.241	4.387	4.138	4.800	14,24,34
Miscues					
RMR repetition	2.069	2.355	2.690	1.467	24,34
RMS subs	2.310	4.129	3.345	1.167	12,24
PC total	94.90	93.39	95.03	96.73	14,24,34
Recall from Retelling					
WCRD wrd/clause	6.411	6.937	6.360	7.052	34

*T-test approximate significance